2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

561 with the main activities of the groups, though it did to some extent illustrate mutual relationships.

Age-Set terms

	Northern Ngoni	*Central Ngoni*
[184 All children	*abantwana*	*ana*
104] Young men even if married	*amajaha*	*anyamata*
Young girls before puberty	*inkahazana*	*mabuthu*
Young girls past puberty	*izintombi*	*anamwali*
All married women	*abafazi*	*ahasi*
Senior men	*amadoda*	*madoda*
Senior women	*amanina*	*manina*

513 561 866 One of the most characteristic forms of Ngoni village organization was the *laweni*, or boys' dormitory. It included the older boys in the group called 'children' and the young men until they married, who were in fact called *amajaha* after they had left the *laweni* and married and had huts of their own. The age for entering the *laweni* was approximately seven years, and was as a rule determined by the age when a child began to get his second teeth. When a child was going about the village with several gaps in his front teeth, his companions jeered at him if he still slept in his grandmother's hut, and his father took the view that it was time he stopped playing like a child and took up seriously the job of herding goats and calves. There was often some hesitation, especially among boys who were not so well grown for their age, at taking the plunge and going to live in the *laweni*, since once made the step could not be retraced. It was primarily an individual decision. It meant leaving the protective affectionate care of the grandmother in the evenings, and the care-free play all day round the mother's hut with meals provided by her, for a different sort of existence altogether. *Laweni* life was rigorous and was dominated by the senior boys living in the hut. The younger ones were at their mercy, and were made to 'fag' for their elders, clean up the hut, sometimes steal food from their mothers' stores, and were beaten if they were slow or careless, or if they threatened to tell the [626] elders in the village what went on in the *laweni*. The main weapon to get boys into the *laweni* was the ridicule of their fellows. Once members of the *laweni* group they were disciplined into obedience by threats and beating. The age range within a *laweni* was often considerable, from seven to seventeen years.

233 857 561 All the boys in a *laweni* who were members of houses possessing cattle—and this as a rule included all sons of Ngoni families of trans-Zambesi clans—had to take part in herding. Cattle-herding was a responsible task and could be an arduous one. The boys got up before dawn, opened the gate of the kraal, and took the cattle to water. They milked the cattle on an open space near the village and carried the milk in wooden jars, gourds or petrol tins to the owner of the cattle, keeping

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

some for themselves as their perquisite. They then drove the cattle to pasture, and this might be some distance away when grass was scarce in the dry season. They sometimes drove the cattle back near the village to rest at noon under the shade trees, but if the pasture was far away the cattle rested there and went on feeding later. They were brought back to the kraal in the late afternoon and counted by one of the senior men.

The herd-boys taught each other to fight with sticks, to wrestle, to catch rats and small birds, to use the knobkerry, catapults, and bows and arrows. Sometimes in the afternoon they went to other villages and challenged another herd to a fight between bulls.[1] During the long day's herding, the boys used to drink milk, make *amasi* (milk curds) in a gourd and eat it, bake birds in clay and roast ears of maize taken from their mothers' grain stores. Precedence among the herd-boys depended first on age and only secondly on the rank and position of the families they belonged to. There was an easily recognizable air of authority and almost of arrogance among the older boys responsible for their fathers' and uncles' cattle. They superintended the process of letting out the cattle, milking them, driving them to pasture and the return to the kraal in the evening. Mounted on donkeys, wearing large straw hats made by themselves, the senior boys acted like ranch owners bossing up inefficient work hands.

This period of living in the *laweni* was, as we have seen, shared by boys of a wide age group. In a large village where there were two or three or four *laweni*, there was often one in each section, which generally meant that the boys belonging to one *banja* or section shared one *laweni*. This had the effect of dividing them up to some extent on a basis of family and rank, but in a *laweni* serving a whole village all the boys went in together whatever families they came from. There was no respecting of clan status in the *laweni* and young boys of high-ranking families had to wait on and obey older boys of lower rank. *Laweni* life was therefore a democratizing influence among the boys of the village, and no boys were excused from herding cattle because they belonged to a house which owned cattle. Even if some went to school and others did not, the school-boys had to take their share of herding in the holidays. Ngoni chiefs and leading men laid great emphasis on keeping the boys busy and making them carry out the work allotted to them. The older boys began to listen in at court cases and to discuss them among themselves. During the wet season from time to time they formed hoeing parties for clearing new ground and for the periodical weeding of gardens. They seldom did any continuous cultivation, as the women and the older men did, and a boy who liked to go off and hoe by himself was pointed out as one with rather peculiar tastes.

During this period of *laweni* life, when in addition to herding the

[1] For the relation between the training of herd-boys and preparation for war, see Part II, Chap. I, p. 30.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

561 866 boys took more interest and more part in adult occupations and affairs, the emergence of leadership among Ngoni boys of high-ranking families was watched by their elders and recognized by their age mates. This was the formative period when a boy's capacity to succeed his father in a position of authority was carefully observed and judged. The Ngoni had ways of passing over a man who was a physical weakling, a coward in face of danger, a sadistic bully to weaker men, a pursuer of women and a breaker-up of marriages. The *madoda* in a Ngoni village, who appeared to let the boys in the *laweni* manage their own affairs without interfering, had nevertheless a shrewd idea of who was making good and who was proving disappointing. Their comments, showing continued observation over a long period, were often expressed when two or three friends and age mates from the *laweni* decided to go off to the south to work together. The *madoda* would then say: 'We hope they will come back soon and not be "lost". So and so is like his father and he will help us here in the village'; or they might comment: 'Good riddance, they were always hanging round the girls—worthless ones, indeed' (*wa chabe ndithu*).

881 856 It has already been pointed out that there was no circumcision school nor public initiation rite among the Ngoni. At puberty the ritual observed was a private and personal affair. On a boy's first nocturnal emission his age mates informed an older boy in the *laweni*, who told him to go at once before it was light and bathe in the river, and to do so [823 827] each morning after an emission. This use of cold water was believed to give a boy strength and virility. The boy was also instructed by the older boys in the *laweni* on how to behave to his equals and his elders and to women. This stage was called *ukuchayiwa nga' manzi*, 'to be beaten with water', and was not reported to the older people. When the older people noticed that the boy's voice was breaking, his father inquired whether he had passed puberty and, on being assured of this, he found a man who knew the *uludengele* medicine. The father killed a goat, and the medicine man took some of the unchewed cud from the goat's stomach, mixed it with the bitter *uludengele* root and put it on a pan over a fire. This took place near the gate of the kraal or near the parents' hut, with the father and the father's male relatives standing by. When the mixture boiled, the boy was told to dip the tips of his fingers in the pan one after the other and lick each one quickly. At the same time he kept jumping over the fire and striking his elbows against his sides. The Ngoni believed that this medicine gave boys physical strength and stamina and they administered it to their servants' sons as well. It was still practised in the 1930's among Ngoni who were educated and partly westernized.

867 881 While the organization of the *laweni* catered for all boys from their second teeth till their marriage, including boys from the age sets called *abantwana* and *amajaha*, the organization of girls' life followed a

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

V

Village Life for older Brothers and Sisters

Second teeth: a new stage

858 We saw in Chapter II that Ngoni children who lost their first teeth, and acquired their second, had reached a new stage in their development. The obvious gaps in their mouths
[856] were filled, and this might happen between the ages of six-and-a-half and seven-and-a-half, and some of the children might be rather small and slight for their age. Socially, because they had their second teeth, and because it was a sign of physical change recognized by everyone, the Ngoni adult would regard these children as ready for a different kind of life than that described in the previous chapter. The children were no longer dependent on adults for the detailed care and attention which we saw in the last chapter spelled security for the young child because every need of his was met. These older children could feed themselves, wash themselves, say what they wanted, speak correctly, and were beginning to behave as Ngoni children were expected to behave in all the relationships and activities of daily living. They were still in the wider sense dependent on adults for their basic needs—food to eat, a place to sleep in, tasks to perform, care when sick. But they had passed completely out of the hands of nurse girls, and the boys, to a very large extent, out of the control and surveillance of the women.

● [866] A new-found independence had begun to show in the little boys before they got their second teeth. Independence

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

then meant running out of the compound to the freedom of the village. At that time young children might behave outrageously and be punished for it, but they were not held accountable. The nurse girls and the mother, or some other adult, was blamed for letting the child grow up with such an uncontrolled temper or appetite or tongue. Once children were recognized as having passed the young child stage, that is when they had their second teeth, they themselves were held accountable for their behaviour and punished more severely, even though parents were also blamed for careless upbringing. The social sanctions of rebuke and ridicule, which began to operate in the later years of young childhood to only a limited extent, were now seen in their full force, made use of by adults, and still more effectively by the children's own age-mates. The fear of estrangement, of social ostracism as the penalty for failing to conform to the required manners and ways of living, had increasing force as the children grew older. As little children they were buttressed and protected by adults in their childish quarrels with, and moods and attitudes towards, other children. As boys in the dormitory and as girls in the girls' circle they had no longer such protection, and the result was that they became increasingly sensitive to the opinion of their peers. Professor Wilson in her study of Nyakusa age-villages, has called this social awareness the quality known as 'being good company'—getting on well with their contemporaries.

It was at this stage, at the beginning of the children's newly-found independence, that the ear-piercing ceremony took place. In contrast with the neighbouring peoples, the Ngoni had no facial or body markings, and it was the pierced ears which showed they were true Ngoni. In the days of warfare, captives, especially boys and men, were forcibly made to have their ears pierced, and hence a number of men in the Ngoni kingdoms who were not of Ngoni clans were found with pierced ears. Sometimes their children went to their parents and said, 'We want to be made Ngoni now.'

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

852 304 Children of Ngoni families, as also these others, chose their own time to have their ears pierced, though sometimes their father or father's sister or father's mother reminded them that it was about time. It was nearly always soon after the second teeth had come, and children who delayed having it done were taunted by their fellows: 'You, are you afraid, my age-mate? See my ears already have bone in them.' This [237] was a reference to the round plugs of bone inserted when the hole was large enough. A bit of thread was put in at first, then a small bit of grass, then a fine reed, and finally a bone plug. Ear piercing was always done in the cold weather so that the lobe of the ear would heal quickly. It was carried out by a leading woman of one of the Ngoni families, who watched the children to see how they took it. They knew it was a test of courage, and however much they were afraid it would hurt, [152] they stood like little statues during the operation, with a face as set and expressionless as when they were being beaten.

Accountability for individual behaviour was one aspect of 866 the responsibility which Ngoni adults now began to demand 868 from children. Another aspect was the performance of their allotted tasks. The responsibility for cattle herding was in a sense a corporate responsibility of all the boys whose fathers owned cattle. The older herd-boys had in fact to answer for [233] the condition of the cattle they brought back every evening to their owners. They passed on, however, a number of small duties, such as care of the calves, sheep and goats, to the younger boys, who in turn were held responsible by the older boys for performing these duties. The boys' world, centred in the dormitory, recognized grades of responsibility from which no one escaped.

Another facet of responsibility which was at a later stage 868 remarked on often by Ngoni adults, was seen in children's [517] choice of leisure-time occupations, according to their individual manual and intellectual and artistic capacities. They stopped playing childish games and began instead to develope their skills in making things from local materials.